



# California Wildlife Center

## October 27, 2023



Fawn wrapped in a towel.



Mule Deer fawn in enclosure, seen with an observation camera.

### What is Capture Myopathy?

At California Wildlife Center, we help over 170 different native wildlife species. Some of these animals are prey and can suffer from Capture Myopathy. It is the outcome of muscle damage from physical exertion, struggle, or emotional stress and can be fatal. There are some physical signs that an animal may be experiencing Capture Myopathy, including increased heart and respiratory rates, elevated body temperature, muscle spasms and stiffness. Stumbling can also occur, which is an indication that the muscles are breaking down and the kidneys have been affected.

While other species such as badgers and coyotes may suffer from Capture Myopathy, deer and rabbits are the most susceptible. When chased by a predator, psychological changes that are linked to fear occur almost immediately. It may appear at first that the animal is calm, however they are in fight or flight mode and under a great amount of stress as they notice a predator approaching. Even though they aren't trying to escape, they are undergoing a significant amount of mental and physical strain. Once the fear sets in, physical changes appear and it becomes apparent that the animal is likely experiencing Capture Myopathy, with increased breathing and heart rate that elevates the stress. That is when these animals may truly be "scared to death."

Prior to intake at our facility, an animal has already undergone a heightened level of anxiety whether being orphaned and nervous, or injured and scared. When we receive rescued animals at CWC, we take every precaution to minimize

any stress the new patient may be experiencing from transport. We are very sensitive to the animals' needs during examination, emphasizing a calm environment from intake and throughout the duration of their stay. There is no treatment or cure for Capture Myopathy, therefore prevention is the best method to avoid this condition from happening. When a Mule Deer fawn arrives to our facility, we move them into a quiet and warm area to decrease any distress during transfer. Loud noises and sounds can intensify their anxiety, so we are very mindful to maintain a quiet space in their presence. Additionally, we also cover their eyes to keep stress at a minimum while performing any examination.

We limit human interaction as much as possible when they are in their enclosures. When we interact with the deer for any reason, our staff wear camouflage hooded ponchos and move throughout the space carefully in efforts to not disturb our patients. We also have installed cameras in their enclosures to monitor them at all times.

Fear is the largest factor that causes Capture Myopathy. If you find an injured or orphaned Mule Deer out in the wild, contact your local wildlife rehabilitation center as soon as possible rather than intervening directly. You can do even more to help wildlife by donating at [cawildlife.org](http://cawildlife.org), and "Celebrate Our Deer Friends."